

Gender Injustice - An Aspect of Disparity in Shobha De's Snapshots

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Abstract — Shobha De, one of the modern Indian women novelist probes into the fathoms of the psyche of the modern woman and her cares and qualms in her fiction. She explores the world of the modern urban woman as her novels are the slice of urban life. They deal with contemporary issues related to subjugated and marginalized women. She realistically presents an intimate side of the urban woman's life in her novels and at the same time reveals her plight in the present-day society. It is a fact that the woman is a victim everywhere of the prevalent social norms. She gets trapped within the set moral codes and social norms of society and consequently leads to an unhappy life. The woman of urban life is no exception to it.

Keywords: Injustice, Disparity, Marginalization.

I. INTRODUCTION

Shobha De's anxiety with the different aspects of a woman's life makes her represent a range of women and it is this depiction of women that brings out the different ways the women are subjected to male supremacy. In most of her novels, she has paid attention to the marginalization of women and gender injustice in Indian society. It is the fact that the preponderance of women in the last century was content with their lot of servitude in the home and society. But recently numerous women have expressed their discontent with their inferior status and strived for equality with men. They protested and agitated for equal fundamental rights.

Being a woman, Shobha De through some of her women characters presents a very vibrant depiction of the discrimination between men and women prevailing in society even today. She discharges our consideration of women's exploitation, prejudice, and commodification. Women in this male-dominated society are treated with a double standard. On one side, women are opting for careers in space research and undertaking many important scientific and technical projects and at the other point, they are the targets of sexual exploitation. Though this seems contradictory there is nothing strange because in reality subjugation and marginalization are the vital

factors in the lives of women. The calculation is simple: if a patriarchal society is to survive, a woman as a person cannot. Indian society has been and is even today a male-dominated society. In the Indian social structure, a woman has been practically granted a subordinate position. Naturally, she does not have independent status and is supposed to perform all the household duties but has limited rights. Her main job is to manage the house and rear the children. She is on duty for eighteen hours a day with no leisure of any sort. Though she performs honestly all household duties, she does not get financial freedom. Moreover, it is a woman who is victimized and discriminated at every stage and is never regarded as an autonomous being. She has always been assigned a subordinate and relative position in all spheres of life. As Simone de Beauvoir (1987: 16) points out:

Man can think of himself without a woman. She cannot think of herself without a man. And she is simply what man decrees.... She appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him, she is sex- absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated concerning man and not he concerning her, she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute- she is the other. (Second Sex)

It is in this context one can understand the marginalization of Indian women at the hands of men in Snapshots, De's unique novel where there is no single woman protagonist. It is about the life of six women – Aparna, Rashmi, Swati, Reema, Surekha, and Noor. They were friends at school– "the girls' from Santa Maria High School, leading predictable, mundane lives of domesticity and imagined bliss." (70) These friends had drifted away in the course of time and "disintegrated through marriages, transfers and unshared interests." (11) Swati one of them staying in London is asked to write, direct and produce a bold and meaty serial on the

exciting world of Nineties Indian Urban woman, "for which she needs authentic voices." (222) Despite their problems, initial resistance, and dislike for Swati, they all attend the get-together lunch. There is so much to share: some memories were happy, some bitter, and some poisonous. Swati, the organizer, tells her friends: "We are not here just to chit-chat; I want to know everything about everybody from the time we left the school. Every single dirty detail." (90) The experiences of these six women included rape, infidelity, lies, and even death. The novelist throws significant light on the life of upper-class women in India through these women characters.

The six ex-schoolmates and friends in Snapshots have diverse nuptial position. They are housewives, who had arranged marriages. Rashmi is an unwed mother, having the responsibility of a son. Swati and Aparna are divorcees. Swati leads a life of her own with her former husband in London. As far as Aparna is concerned, she is not ready to repeat the 'mistake' of marrying again and even the term 'husband' is an 'awful' and filthy word for her. Shobha De highlights the disparity between old and young women's attitudes towards marriage, love, and life by contrasting the views of Aparna and her mother. If 'husband' is a terrible word for Aparna, for her mother a woman is incomplete without a husband. The conventional mother of Aparna says :

Remember, a woman in our society is nothing without a husband. Study as much as you wish. Win prizes, get a good job. But don't let all these things affect you, give you a big head. You may be the prime minister of India tomorrow, but when you come home, you automatically become your husband's wife. If you forget that you are finished. Your marriage is finished. (Snapshots 24-25)

Aparna's mother's approach is conventional like that of Shashi Deshpande's female characters. For her, matrimony is a authenticity. On the other hand, Aparna like the ultra-modern woman castoffs the institute of marriage. Noor is still a maid and is damned to die spinster at the end of the novel. Thus, though marriage is a sacrament in India, in the fictional world of Shobha De, it is not regarded as necessary. The women characters in Snapshots who pander to in different exhibitionist activities finally turn into a useful plaything for men in a patriarchal society. The ruling ideology that favors man prompts these women to fall prey to the designs of man by satisfying his erotic fantasies. Their lives remain the same, whether inside or outside marriage, they are all equally without hope. The women of modern society are trapped due to their power

madness. Each one of them is trapped by a patriarchal society.

In Snapshots, the men who subjugate, oppress, and exploit women are Rohit, Parminder (Pips), Mr. Bridges, Mr. Juan Mendonca, and Balbir's father. They are all existing as tyrants whereas the women – Aparna, Rashmi, Swati, and Noor, are all sufferers of male autocracy. For instance, all the men Aparna knew were egocentric and ineffective, including her father. She detested the truth that she had to organize for Rohit's evening wine and work alone in the kitchen as she was a woman whereas Rohit would enjoy Jazz in the air-conditioned room because he hated food smells. In addition, he refused to discharge her longing for a baby. Instead, he deserts her one night when she forgets to bring wine from the office. He walked out of her life without any explanation or an apology. Thus she falls victim to Rohit's cruelty and betrayal. Though Aparna is a successful career woman, she is always at the mercy of the dominant male who wishes to use women. It is Prem who exploits her sexually. Rashmi is another such woman subjugated by Parminder. His admission and reside in Rashmi's house for six months 'stunned' the people of the film industry. He is well-off but lives on the income of Rashmi and deserts her when she badly needs money. His ill-treatment to Rashmi proves that he is a victimizer and a smart manipulator. Rashmi's affairs with different men cannot give her a sense of contentment and safety. In every relationship, she is the loser. She is disillusioned with men, for "she hadn't met one she genuinely felt like sharing her life with" (49). Swati, though authoritative of all the friends, also reveals how she was isolated and separated by her husband Mr. Bridges from London who goes and 'bad-mouths' her in the court and calls her a 'negligent bitch'. She is bodily mortified when she receives beating in the hands of Mr. Juan Mendonca. Surekha is a housewife tied to domestic duties. Both, her mother-in-law and her husband torment her. Her sole concern is family. She has to struggle to furnish to the needs of each and everybody. She is a sufferer of her real brother Nawaz, who exploits her sexually. She was brought up by an elderly maid because both her parents were caught up in their extra-marital affairs. All these portrayals of women make it crystal-clear that women are subjugated by men in one way or the other and the injustice done to them.

De represents an interesting depiction of the disorder of the real world of her female characters. The husband-wife relationship in her fictional world seems to be redundant as the predicament faced by them due to the burden of living together, willingly or unwillingly, is

irksome. There are emotional confrontation and internal aggravation that direct to their despondency.

It is a reality that with the exception of for a few well-known women in the literary, social, and political circles, the world today is still male-dominated. But the achievement of these women cannot be taken as a measure of the circumstance of women in general. For common women, there is still an unpromising indifference towards their agony. Undoubtedly, the condition is improving but yet it is far from pleasing. It cannot be deprived of that everywhere women employees are clichéd and poorly paid. It is predictable that at least in independent countries like India women should be treated as equal to men. But it is the catastrophic fact that even in these countries the right to equality and liberty exists only in the constitution. Now women have started working in the fields subjugated by men but that has not brought an end to male authority. In addition, one cannot pay any attention to the truth that women have taken up jobs only after they have obtained the approval of the male members of their family. Hence, under the existing situation, women must comprehend that they have to endure themselves in the male supremacy. For this, the subjugated and marginalized women must build up the harmony and integrity of mind, determination of principle, valor, autonomy, and self-assertion. 'That long silence' since time immemorial has to be broken out.

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